RV Business

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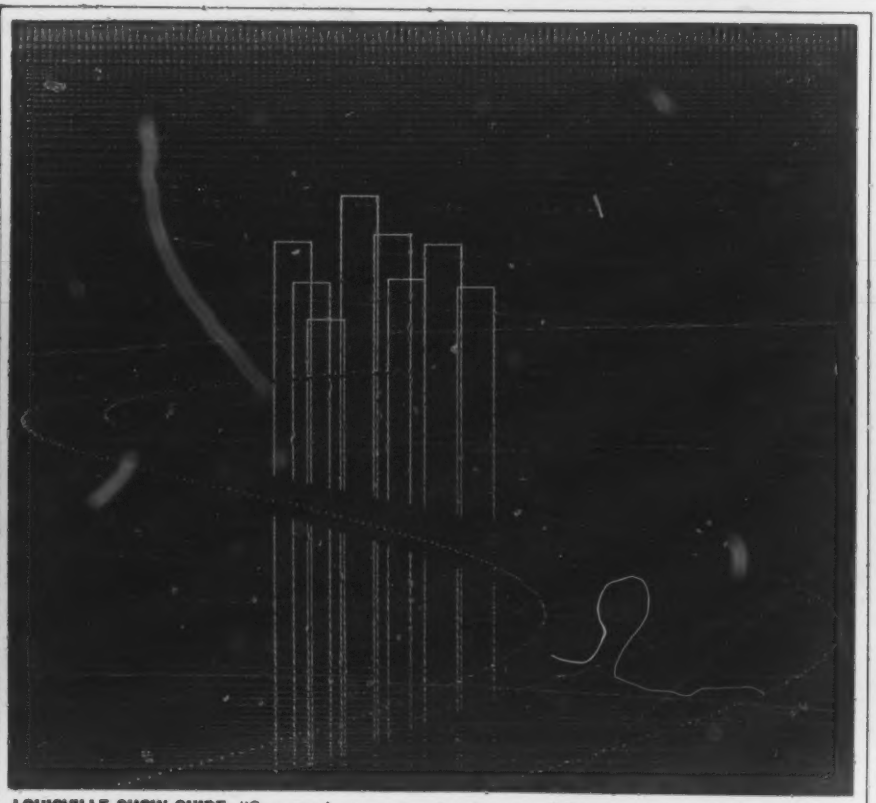

LOUISVILLE SHOW GUIDE: "One good reason to attend . . . profit" is the theme of this year's 26th Annual National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky. To make the RVIA-sponsored show an even more profitable experience for attendees, *RV Business* is offering a comprehensive special section, complete with floorplans, exhibitor listings, an events calendar and a guide to Louisville's wide array of restaurants. See page 90 for show details.

Fifth-Wheels Dominate Dodger Show

Apparently responding to the soaring popularity of pickup trucks, a host of RV manufacturers unveiled an impressive number of new fifth-wheel travel trailers during the two trade days, Nov. 1-2, of the RVIA-sponsored L.A. RV Show at Dodger Stadium.

The spate of new fivers was a direct response to strong fifth-wheel sales, manufacturers indicated. Annual fifth-wheel shipments grew from 6,300 to 27,100 units between 1980 and 1987. Current-year retail activity was up a full 18.5% through July, according to Statistical Surveys Inc., Grand Rapids, Mich., compared with a less stellar 5% increase in travel-trailer sales during the same period.

Echoing the sentiment of many OEMs at Dodger Stadium, Robert "Boots" Ingram, board chairman of Teton Homes, a high-end fifth-wheel maker in Casper, Wyo., stated, "Our market in fifth-wheels has been fantastic. This year, we'll be up about 35%. And our expectations for next year are nothing but up. We feel very confident the market is going to hold."

Show attendees were presented with a wide price range for the new fifth-wheels. For example, while Lance Camper Manufacturing Corp., Pacoima, Calif., unveiled a 23-foot rear-bath fiver for midsize pickups, Teton rolled out a big 40-foot triple-axle "quad level" unit with double slide-outs, washer/dryer, twin air units and microwave, which retails in the "low $50,000s."

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This special section on the National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky., features floorplans, exhibitor lists, an events calendar and a guide to local dining.

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SEPTEMBER WAS A REAL 'BUMMER'

GAYLORD MAXWELL

September was a difficult month for most dealers on RVB's Dealer Advisory Board (DAB). In fact, compared with the previous September, it was a real "bummer."

For the first time this year, the monthly dollar-sales volume for the month was less than for the corresponding month last year. Fifteen of the 23 members of the board fell short of last year's numbers. Both new- and used-unit totals were down. The three largest categories of RV types (motorhomes, travel trailers and camping trailers) were down in new-unit sales. Motorhomes and camping trailers failed to make the plus column in used units. Bottom lines were reported poor by more than half the DAB members, and most of the other members called them only fair. Lot traffic generally had fallen off.

In spite of all the bad news, there were some good signs. Eight (35%) of the DAB members were up in dollars taken in. Grosses were reported generally good on travel trailers and used units. The service and accessory business was good. Inventories were generally in good shape.

All in all, it wasn't a disaster, but it was one of those months that most dealers hope won't soon be repeated.

Motorhomes

It has been a good year for most motorhome dealers on the DAB. However, in September, only two of the 18 members (both very large dealerships) who stock motorized units managed to top last September's figures. Nine were down; seven stayed the same. But even with the substantial drop in September in new-unit sales, the year-to-date figure was still well ahead of last year.

Quite surprisingly, used units dropped into the minus column (1% down) for the year-to-date.

Motorhome profits were generally a bit on the soft side, with ratings ranging from good, down to poor.

Travel Trailers

The 21 DAB members who stock travel trailers were about equally divided between those who were up from the previous September and those who were down. In most cases, differences were slight, and the total number of new units sold was only about a dozen less than last September. The significance, however, was the fact that, after a good start in the early part of the year, sales tapered off, and the year-to-date figure was slightly down compared with 1987.

Used-unit sales were up a bit for the month, as they were for the year-to-date.

Profits were generally rated good.

Truck Campers

Although the unit numbers were small, new truck-camper sales were up a bit in percentages for the month. Of the 10 DAB members who reported new-unit sales this year, only three reported sales in September. Used units held their own with last year. Year-to-date, the numbers weren't so good. Both new and used sales were down.

Profits were rated fair, good and excellent by the three reporting dealers.

Folding Camping Trailers

It has been a struggle all year for folding camping trailer dealers, and September differed only in that sales were worse than they had been. However, the large percentage drop for the month primarily represented substantially fewer sales by two large fold-down dealers. Year-to-date, the figures were not so bad, even though they were smaller in '88 than they were last year.

Used units of folding camping trailers were down for the month, but they were still up slightly for the year-to-date.

Profits were generally rated fair to poor.

Fifth-Wheels

In terms of percentages, fivers are proving to be the real champions this year. The very substantial increases for the month in both new and used units were very close to the year-to-date figures, which were indeed impressive.

Some of the increase was due to the very serious entry of two DAB members into the fifth-wheel business. However, most of the 16 DAB members who stock this RV type were up from the previous year.

Profits were rated about equally between excellent, good and fair. Δ

	FOR MONTH			YEAR-TO-DATE			FOR MONTH			YEAR-TO-DATE		
	SEPT. 1988	SEPT. 1987	% CHANGE	1988	1987	% CHANGE	SEPT. 1988	SEPT. 1987	% CHANGE	1988	1987	% CHANGE
MOTORHOMES	113	139	−19	1,437	1,311	+10	101	132	−23	1,278	1,295	−1
TRAVEL TRAILERS	76	88	−14	1,036	1,085	−5	100	97	+3	1,025	995	+3
TRUCK CAMPERS	19	17	+12	181	191	−5	9	9	0	91	130	−30
CAMPING TRAILERS	35	55	−36	[illegible]	1,045	−14	17	27	−37	343	326	+5
FIFTH-WHEELS	29	20	+45	536	237	+42	17	8	+113	208	151	+38

	SEPT. 1988	SEPT. 1987	% CHANGE	1988	1987	% CHANGE
SALES VOLUME	$10,097,508	$11,089,146	−9	$123,151,661	$112,152,485	+10
TOTAL UNIT SALES	516	592	−13	6,836	6,766	+1
NEW-UNIT SALES	272	319	−15	3,891	3,869	+1
USED-UNIT SALES	244	273	−11	2,945	2,897	+2

The "DAB Perspective" is a compilation of data provided by *RV Business*' Dealer Advisory Board (DAB), a group comprised of 24 dealers representing a cross section of the U.S. dealer body.

Gaylord Maxwell, chairman; **Dave Altman,** Baldwin Park, Calif.; **Robert Azevedo,** Sunnyvale, Calif.; **Jack Cole,** Pacoima, Calif.; **Dick Dasson,** Victor, N.Y.; **Bill De Groot,** Junction City, Ore.; **Crosby Forrest,** Newport News, Va.; **Dan Gamel,** Fresno, Calif.; **Jerry Greer,** Columbus, Ohio; **Jerry Harrison,** Waco, Texas; **Dottie Helgeson,** Seattle, Wash.; **Newton Kindlund,** Orlando, Fla.; **Ozzie Lenhard,** Sayville, N.Y.; **Larry McClain,** Oklahoma City, Okla.; **Annette Autry-Miller,** Fayetteville, N.C.; **Jack Moran,** Warwick, R.I.; **Mike Peay,** Albuquerque, N.M.; **Edward Peterson,** Lafayette, Ind.; **William Pifer,** Warren, Mich.; **Tom Schaeffer,** Shoemakersville, Pa.; **Mel Shipp,** Chattanooga, Tenn.; **Jack Sisemore,** Amarillo, Texas; **Bill Thomas,** Bridgeton, Mo.; **Randy Thompson,** Crystal Lake, Ill.; **Larry Washburn,** Lakewood, Colo.

This report is an attempt to reflect the current retail sales picture; it does not purport to indicate RV production or factory sales to dealers.